



To: Hon. Mike McCarthy, Chair, House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs

From: Jim Dandeneau, Executive Director, Vermont Democratic Party

Re: Draft Elections Bill, DR-23-075, Draft 1.4

Dear House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs,

My name is Jim Dandeneau and I am the Executive Director of the Vermont Democratic Party. The VDP works to engage Vermonters in the political process at every level, from encouraging participation in Town Meeting Day all the way up to recruiting, training, and supporting candidates running for public office at every level. We have party members holding leadership positions in about half of the towns in Vermont, in cities and towns ranging from Burlington to Maidstone, with robust, active party organizations in every county.

I am here today to share with you the VDP's thoughts on this new election bill, along with a couple of suggestions on how to improve language in it. With 2024 being a presidential election year and all of the work that entails, both from an elections administration aspect and a party building one, we have a busy two years ahead of us, but this bill will make it easier for voters to cast informed ballots, and for parties to encourage participation in our entire process.

The Sore Loser Law is very helpful in streamlining the election process. The primary process in Vermont is very open, encouraging voters to speak their minds early in the election and encouraging strong, hard-working candidates. However, the quirk of our election law that allows candidates who lose primaries to try and grab other ballot lines forces voters to occasionally have to reiterate their choices and muddies the waters in a general election. This section provides clarity to voters casting their ballots in a general election who might be confused by the fact that someone they already voted against, who lost, is appearing again on the ballot.

Aligning the independent candidate filing deadline with the major party candidate filing deadline makes it easier for candidates, parties, and election administrators to plan their campaign season. In an ideal world, candidates are talking to voters constantly, but as we all know, we rarely live in that ideal scenario. Having an earlier understanding of all of the candidates on the ballot helps everyone to plan their campaign work accordingly, while also adding a level of fairness for major party candidates, who are often running on an unknown playing field for months before discovering who their opponents are. It also helps voters because it encourages potential candidates to identify themselves earlier, giving voters more time to understand their options. to plan and execute their campaign around the Primary.

73 Main St. Suite 400 Montpelier, VT 05601 • (802) 229-1783 • vtdemocrats.org

PAID FOR BY THE VERMONT DEMOCRATIC PARTY. NOT AUTHORIZED BY ANY CANDIDATE OR CANDIDATE'S COMMITTEE, VTDEMOCRATS.ORG.



With regard to the changes to campaign finance limits, there is some disagreement among campaign finance professionals in the state about what counts as a contribution and what is the sale of an object of value. This confusion does not exist at a federal level, because federal campaign finance law allows for unlimited transfers between parties and party candidates - the question of what is the sale of something of value becomes entirely academic, because all of the money transferred between parties and candidates is subject to reporting, but does not hit a campaign contribution limit. Under state law, this confusion continues to exist. This section would clarify that distinction, rendering it academic at the state level as well, while retaining crucial reporting requirements that provide transparency for voters.

Party affiliation is shorthand for the general public. Voters won't know everything about a candidate's values or policy positions simply from the party affiliation, but it does tell them quite a bit. Adding a self-reporting requirement for party committee reorganization adds another data point for voters as they try and learn about who they're voting for. It also helps with party business - as we head into a presidential election, parties are working to make sure that the delegates we send to our respective national nominating conventions reflect the will of the party. Knowing who has worked to make their town and county parties more effective helps understand better who the best representatives at those conventions would be. Streamlining the nomination process also helps provide clarity for voters with limited ability to do extensive research on candidates.

While collecting demographic information on candidates is a great way to give voters a full picture of who the candidates are, we are concerned about the risk it poses to candidates from historically marginalized backgrounds. In the 2022 election alone, candidates of color faced property damage and harassment from voters even with limited personal information available to them. LGBTQ elected officials have stepped down from their positions or refused to run altogether because of targeted harassment towards them and their family. With personal information and demographics made public and easily accessible, there is concern that we will see an increase in harassment and an unprecedented drop in people choosing to run because of this. We would gladly support this section provided personal information was decoupled from location information, to make it less easy for harassers to find these candidates.

We would also like to request additional language be added to the bill to make it easier for military and other overseas voters to return ballots to their clerks. Currently, Vermont voters living abroad are required to return their ballots in the mail, subjecting their votes to potential service disruptions and high postage. Currently, 33 states and the District of Columbia (with all varieties of political leanings, from deep blue California to deep red Oklahoma) allow overseas voters to return their paper ballots electronically. These returned ballots have a paper trail, and many of the states that allow for electronic return have those ballots opened on secure computers by bipartisan pairs of election officials, similar to how Justices of the Peace deliver

73 Main St. Suite 400 Montpelier, VT 05601 • (802) 229-1783 • vtdemocrats.org

PAID FOR BY THE VERMONT DEMOCRATIC PARTY. NOT AUTHORIZED BY ANY CANDIDATE OR CANDIDATE'S COMMITTEE, VTDENOCRATS.ORG.



absentee ballots here in Vermont. Allowing electronic return of ballots would make it easier and less costly for Vermonters working abroad or serving their country to participate in our elections.

Finally, I take great personal pleasure in seeing a consent of candidacy form requirement for write in candidates, for the simple reason that I gave up my two monitor setup when I rejoined the VDP, and trying to scroll across 82 columns in an excel spreadsheet, past countless Donalds Duck, to find hard vote totals for statewide office is nigh impossible on a cheap laptop. I'm sure our clerks will provide more detailed, technical information on why this is a needed change, but I think asking serious write in candidates to put themselves forward just before election day is a worthwhile tradeoff for making those results easier to digest.